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Posted on [17/01/2015](#) by [Karen Baston](#)

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Robert Burns, William Adam, Henry Cockburn, Robert Dundas, Henry Raeburn, Lord Kames, George Drummond, Captain John Porteous and James Boswell are just some of the figures of the Scottish Enlightenment and Edinburgh's golden age to feature in the 734 indexed volumes of court papers owned by the WS Society.

'Session Papers' were used to present cases in the Court of Session. They were an integral part of legal practice until reforms to Court procedure took place in the early nineteenth century. As James Boswell put it: 'Ours is a court of papers. We are never seriously engaged but when we write'.

Surviving Session Papers are a valuable resource for historians since they capture the issues that concerned the parties involved in legal cases and can sometimes provide details not found elsewhere. They also record changes in legal practice, for example, what books lawyers used for their citations in support of their arguments.

All of life and drama is here – from piracy and slavery to publishing disputes and quarrels over land and nuisance – and now that the WS Society's unique index to these papers has been placed online, this vast and untapped historical resource is open to researchers and historians anywhere in the world.

Originally compiled by Alexander Mill during the Great War of 1914-1918, the Session Papers Index has existed until now only in the original bound volumes at the Signet Library and at the Register Office in Edinburgh. Mill served the WS Society as a Library Assistant for 65 years between 1870 to 1935. His Index is a remarkable achievement.

With Mill's four volumes – two name indexes, a subject index, an index to Writers to the Signet in the Papers, and an index to the unique maps and plans contained in the Papers – online, his work is open to the scholars of the world. Each of the digitised volumes includes an introduction to the Session Papers and guidance on how to use Mill's references.

To see the WS Society Session Papers Index and begin your research, find the 4 volumes at these addresses:

[Volume 1: Parties A-K](#)

[Volume 2: Parties L-Z](#)

[Volume 3: Subjects and Writers to the Signet](#)

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If you would like to consult the original Index in person or the Session Papers it lists, contact [James Hamilton](#), Research Principal at the WS Society to make an appointment to visit the Signet Library.

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